

Harriet Beecher Stowe and Her Family
by Mary Katherine May
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Harriet Beecher Stowe came into the world in the year of 1811, born to the Reverend Lyman Beecher's first of three wives. She was sixth of thirteen children. Lyman Beecher in his youth trained as a blacksmith in New England, which was his father's trade. He then attended Yale College, studying for the ministry.

Following graduation Rev. Beecher accepted his first pastorate in Litchfield, after which his fame grew quickly as the result of a series of six sermons on the subject of temperance. While serving at his second post in Boston, Dr. Beecher was invited to be the first president of the new Lane Theological and Literary Seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio, whose goal was to "win the west for Protestantism."

Dr. Beecher was known to be generous to a fault, and at the same time as an eccentric individual. In a book of Harriet Beecher Stowe works published in 1858, the introduction gives a brief account of her life. It's titled an "Account of Mrs. Beecher Stowe and Her Family" by an Alabama Man. This man tells of the first time he heard Lyman Beecher preach, before which he prayed, "And, O Lord! Grant that we may not despise our rulers; and grant that they might not act so, that we can't help it." The Alabama Man relates that despite his poor first impression in which the famous reverend arrived late for the service, dropped his papers out of his hat onto the floor, after praying this shocking prayer, delivered a message "of great beauty and power."

When Harriet was thirteen, she was sent to attend her sister Catherine's female school, and one year later was already teaching a class. When their father moved to Cincinnati, the sisters did also. Harriet then taught in Catherine's school, now located in Cincinnati, until her marriage to the Reverend Calvin Ellis Stowe in 1836. He was Professor of Biblical Literature at the same seminary where her father was President.

Calvin and Harriet Stowe would have seven living children: twin daughters, Eliza and Harriet, Henry who died by drowning at the age of 19 while swimming in the Connecticut River with college friends, Frederick, Georgiana, Samuel Charles, and Charles Edward.

Her son, Frederick Stowe, fought in the Civil War, and was injured at Gettysburg, hit in the head by an artillery shell. Already addicted to alcohol at the age of 16 years, Frederick traveled west by ship following the War to San Francisco, in hopes of breaking his addiction by shipping out to sea. He disappeared before boarding any ship, and was never heard from again. For the remainder of her life, Harriet never gave up hope of seeing her son again, checking the daily mail for any communication about him, and even embracing a man on the street she thought was her lost son.

In 1833 at the Abolition Convention in Philadelphia the address given by Mr. Arthur Tappan, the convention's president and one of Lane Seminary's most generous donors, was forwarded to the school. For eighteen consecutive nights in 1834 the student's debated slavery, and many adopted the cause of abolition. Dr. Beecher, Harriet's father, opposed what he considered a "radical" cause, and refused to offer classes to former slaves. In response, a group of students that came to be known as "Lane's Rebels" walked out. The event is considered one of the instigators of the War Between the States.

Angry slaveholders traveled across the border from Kentucky into Ohio, on to the seminary and violence followed. Cincinnati was a hotbed of controversy before the Civil War, and part of the Underground Railroad direct route to Canada, in which Harriet and Calvin participated. Three times bloody riots broke out in Cincinnati over the issue of slavery.

In 1849, now 37 years old, Harriet was the mother of six young children. After spending close to a year away from her family due to exhaustion and depression, she was quickly returning to the same disposition, as now her husband, Calvin, was away recuperating from illness—he was away fifteen months. Harriet wrote a letter on July 4 of that year to her husband encouraging him not to return home because of the raging cholera epidemic. Harriet gives the statistic that on the day previous to her letter 120 burials had been performed. Only twenty-two days later, on July 26, she wrote a final report to Calvin about their youngest child they had affectionately called Charley who at only 18-months in age he had died of this terrible disease.

Calvin Stowe returned to Cincinnati, and after teaching at the seminary for seventeen years, sought out a new position. He accepted a professorship at Bowdoin College in Maine. It was here, following the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, that Harriet wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which set her name firmly in the history of the United States of America at an esteem that no other in her family of prominent Americans ever matched.

During the decade of 1840 and into the 1850s, Harriet had dealt with personal emotions, overwork, the suicide of her brother, George, had suffered two miscarriages, experienced two violent riots, and the tragedy of losing Charley to cholera. A product of this struggle was the very thoughtful writing that she titled, **Earthly Care: A Heavenly Discipline**. The short work went through multiple publications. Here is an example of Harriet's strong faith, that despite the difficult circumstances coming her way, she knew that she could call on God for support.

In it Harriet responds to two questions: First, Why when we take many burdens to God in prayer, she asked, do we not also pray about all of the little problems, or "vexations" as she called them, that come along each day? Second, Harriet then goes

on to question why, if our minds are to be set on heavenly things, do we not consider these *earthly cares* as experiences given to us by God for growth and maturity?

Thus, the title, ***Earthly Care: A Heavenly Discipline***.

Source Material: Life and Letters of Harriet Beecher Stowe, edited by Annie Fields, Houghton Mifflin and Company, Boston, 1897.

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